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ABSTRACT

This profile describes "Teaching Reading Comprehension," a series of 14 30-minute video programs designed to expand K-8 reading teachers' understanding of the new view of reading as a constructive process and strategic behavior. Each video features at least one nationally recognized reading researcher and educator presenting the findings of his or her own research. The theoretical presentations are followed by at least two classroom examples of each new approach. Among the 14 titles listed in the profile are: (1) "The Current View of Reading Comprehension"; (2) "The Reading Writing Relationship"; (3) "Word Meaning"; (4) "Questioning"; (5) "Story Mapping"; (6) "Developing Active Constructive Readers within the Basal Reader Structure"; and (7) "Becoming Strategic Readers, Strategic Teachers." The profile suggests that reading specialists can make the video programs and recommended readings available; plan and organize other activities to be conducted with teachers before and after viewing each video program; model the practices presented in the video; and coach teachers on the use of the instructional practices. The profile also argues that viewing the video programs seems to be insufficient for teachers to become "strategic teachers" and that using the new practices in an actual classroom is essential for learning to occur. Additionally, the profile suggests that learning one new strategy every other month may be the most many teachers (and students) can manage. (RS)

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Classroom and School Technologies

Profile of Teaching Reading Comprehension

A Video and Print Service Education Series

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PROFILE OF

TEACHING READING COMPREHENSION

A VIDEO AND PRINT INSERVICE EDUCATION SERIES

Dr. Margaret Wilsman

Manager of ITV Research and Evaluation
Wisconsin Educational Radio and Television Networks

One in a Series of Reports on Classroom and School Technologies

July 1987

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Preface to Series

Each day, hundreds of educators -- maybe even thousands -- consider computers, satellites, and other technologies available to enhance instruction in elementary and secondary schools. Some are searching for technology-based or technology-assisted programs to meet certain learning needs of their students or to deliver significant inservice opportunities to teachers. Others are screening candidate programs to decide which, if any, they will use.

Information to help educators consider instructional technologies is plentiful. Teachers and administrators need only to read the pamphlets and brochures in their mailboxes to know that. The fact of plentiful information also is apparent in display rooms at professional conferences and in articles and advertisements in professional journals.

Helping educators find information they need to make decisions is a major responsibility of the North Central Regional Laboratory. Through workshops, consultation, and products, Laboratory staff and partners convey information and make referrals to others on a regular basis. The series of products called Classroom and School Technologies is part of this larger effort.

The series contains many kinds of products. Some, called "profiles," convey essential nuts-and-bolts information about particular systems or programs that involve applications of technology. A profile describes the program or system in terms of its instructional goals and curriculum content, activities for students and teachers, how activities and technology are fitted together, requirements for installation and use, results of evaluation studies, and sources of further detail.

Other products in the series include reviews of particular sets of computer software by the Microsift Program of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory in Portland, Oregon; reports of research and evaluation studies; papers that put forth expert opinion and recommendations; and directories to human and print resources. Readers of the series on Classroom and School Technologies are invited to recommend products that would enrich the series.

The North Central Regional Educational Laboratory began work on the theme of technology applications to instruction in 1985, and many people have made important contributions. Special credit is due to technology coordinators in the state education agencies and others who served on the Technology Advisory Committee in 1985; to Michael Waggoner and his colleagues at the University of Michigan who supported a range of activities in 1986; and to authors of the first set of profiles published in 1987. Lawrence Friedman, Program Associate at the Laboratory, deserves special recognition for managing the development of this product series.

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Profile Brief: Teaching Reading Comprehension

Instructional Goals

To improve the K-8 reading program and students' strategic reading behaviors by expanding teachers' understanding of the new view of reading as a constructive process and strategic behavior. To provide teachers with (a) in-depth examples of the new content they need to add to their lessons, and (b) the new instructional approaches to add to their classroom activities.

Teacher Activities

Teachers can use the video and print materials at their own pace. Teachers can use the viewer's guide to select recommended readings and activities to do both before and after viewing each program.

K-12 Reading Specialist Activities

Reading specialists can make the video programs and recommended readings available to the K-8 reading program; plan and organize other activities to be conducted with teachers before and after viewing each video program; and model the practices presented in the video programs and coach teachers on their own use of the practices.

Role of Technology

Each video program features at least one nationally recognized reading researcher and teacher educator who present the findings of their own research on new approaches to teaching reading comprehension. Their theoretical presentations are followed in the video programs by teachers demonstrating the new comprehension approaches with a class or small group of students.

Overview

Teaching Reading Comprehension is viewed by reading specialists as an effective way to provide "high quality inservice opportunities which meet the varying needs of teachers who work within a wide span of grade levels" (Boyd and Wilsman, 1985, p.14). The series consists of 14, 30-minute video programs and an 80-page viewer's guide. The target audience for the series is the staff of the K-8 reading program, including the principal and librarian.

The 1985 report of the National Commission on Reading, Becoming a Nation of Readers, makes the following statement: The knowledge is now available for making worthwhile improvements in reading throughout the United States. If the practices seen in the classrooms of the best teachers in the best schools could be introduced everywhere, the improvements in reading would be dramatic (page 3).

The three agencies that cooperated in making the Teaching Reading Comprehension video series (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Wisconsin Educational Communications Board, and the US Department of Education) expect the series to provide all classroom teachers with the kind of knowledge mentioned by the commission.

The series presents curriculum change as a long-term project, perhaps taking five years. Knowledge is presented about new lesson content for teachers to add to their reading programs -- knowledge about reading as an active, constructive process and a set of strategic behaviors which students learn and use to independently monitor their own comprehension of text. New instructional methods are presented which teachers add to their reading instruction -- methods called direct explanation, modeling and mediated student-teacher talk, for example.

The Practice and Its Instructional Goals

Each video program features at least one nationally recognized reading researcher and educator. Experts include, Gerald Duffy, Richard Anderson, Scott Paris, Richard Allington, Kathryn Au, Donald Graves, MaryAnne Hall, Jane Hansen, P. David Pearson, Jean Osborn, Lenore Ringler, Trika Smith-Burke, Dorothy Strickland, and Peter Winograd. These experts present the findings of their own research which have suggested new approaches to teaching reading comprehension. Their theoretical presentations are followed in the video programs by at least two classroom examples of each new approach.

The 14 topics of the programs include, in the following order:

1. Nature of Reading Comprehension Instruction Today
2. The Current View of Reading Comprehension
3. The Reading-Writing Relationship
4. Semantic Mapping
5. Word Meaning
6. Integrating Word Analysis
7. Interface
8. Cohesion Comprehension
9. Story Mapping
10. Questioning
11. Main Idea
12. Independent Seatwork
13. Developing Active Constructive Readers within the Basal Reader Structure
14. Becoming Strategic Readers, Strategic Teachers

The first video program presents an overview and analysis of the reading programs in use today. The second presents an overview of the practices from the best classrooms of the best teachers in the best schools.

Programs three through twelve present in-depth examples of these practices. Many of the practices presented, such as semantic mapping, are new, while others, such as main idea, are familiar. However familiar topics are presented within the new view of reading as a constructive process and a strategic behavior. The final two programs are general in nature, and focus on the strategies necessary to improve curriculum.

To facilitate flexible use of the series, a summary of each program appears in the viewer's guide which accompanies the video series. By reading this guide, the viewer can discover topics covered in other and/or preceding programs. Each program contains recommended readings which include recent journal articles written by the experts who appear in that program. Each program also suggests activities for teachers and reading specialists to do before and after viewing the video program. The video producers consider the viewer's guide an important element in promoting the series' goals and purpose.

How to Use the Practice

Examples at the District Level in Wisconsin

1. In Oregon, Wisconsin, the series provided the basis for a fall semester inservice course for which the 24 K-8 classroom teachers received either school, district, or University of Wisconsin-Whitewater credit. Approved for two university credits with a third independent study credit option, the course involved 12 weekly 2-1/2-hour sessions. The most time-consuming part of the planning which took place the preceding spring involved the selection of supplemental readings. While the viewer's guide accompanying the series contains between five and ten suggested readings for each program, the final weekly selection included only two required articles -- one article by the expert appearing in that week's program plus another article which clarified or expanded on the program's focus. These articles, duplicated by the district's printing shop, were distributed the week prior to the program's viewing so that they could be discussed with the program at the next session.

   Another planning step involved selecting 11 of the 14 programs to be used in the 13-week course. The first and last classes were used for pretesting and post testing. Oregon's experience with other video courses suggested that having a knowledgeable facilitator to encourage interaction about the program's content was essential. The district reading specialist served as facilitator at three sessions and handled the district's administrative details at the rest. Six persons from outside the district, including the state supervisor of reading, a University of Wisconsin-Whitewater instructor, two reading teacher educators from nearby universities, and two reading specialists from other districts, facilitated the other programs. To accommodate the schedules of these persons, the video programs were used out of sequence.

   At each regular class session the following schedule was followed:

   a. Facilitator introduced the topic by using either activities listed in the viewer's guide or other activities. Then the class viewed the program.

b. Facilitator discussed and supplemented the material which the class had seen on the videotape. The viewer's guide suggests several activities for use after viewing, but most facilitators used their own supplemental activities.

c. Teachers interacted and shared experiences as they tried out the strategies presented.

d. One or more reprinted articles were assigned, and articles assigned the previous week were discussed.

Beginning with the seventh session, teachers began sharing their experiences of implementing a new practice in two different lessons. After the course, personal half-hour interviews were conducted with 15 teachers to determine the extent of their understanding of reading as a constructive process and strategic behavior.

2. Not every district uses so much outside help to facilitate use of each video program. Before using the video programs, the reading specialist in the Columbus school district met with K-8 reading staff members, whom she divided into four groups. Each group met for one full day and examined the new view of strategic reading comprehension instruction with which the reading specialist was familiar. Next, the district reading specialist held a special parent-teacher evening meeting. The parents were anxious for more information on reading comprehension strategies so they could practice modeling them at home when reading with their own children.

   The Teaching Reading Comprehension video programs are being used to train teachers to teach reading comprehension strategies. Once a month teachers meet with the district reading specialist to view and discuss one video program. During the next month, when the teachers are trying the strategy, the reading specialist meets with them to discuss their concerns and questions.

3. In the Appleton school district, the reading specialist used the district's cable television network during second semester to rebroadcast programs from the series. Each week the same program was broadcast four times -- once before school, two different times during the noon/lunch periods, and again after school. Thus the programs were available for viewing by the high school language arts staff members, as well as the elementary and junior high teachers. However, only those teachers using Storylords, a video and computer series of comprehension instruction, were encouraged by the district's K-12 reading supervisor to use the new reading strategies in their classrooms. (The Storylords materials are described in a separate profile.)

4. In Milwaukee, the district reading supervisor provided an opportunity during August before school began for 3 reading teachers, 9 teachers and the district's 18 reading specialists to view the two introductory programs in the video inservice series and discuss the difference between current reading comprehension instructional practice and the constructive and strategic approach. This day-long inservice session was held in conjunction with preparation by three teachers at elementary schools for use of the Storylords materials during the school year and at all elementary schools offering summer school programs. During the school year, the reading teacher at one of the Milwaukee elementary schools using Storylords used the Teaching Reading Comprehension programs with the K-6 reading staff. Once a month, at a two-hour inservice meeting, they viewed and discussed one of the video programs. Sometimes a guest with expertise in the program's topic was invited to facilitate the meeting.

At the State Level

Approximately 60 persons enrolled in a statewide telecourse through the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. Teaching Reading Comprehension video programs were broadcast on Tuesdays over the state public television network. On alternate Mondays the course participants spoke with the instructor via the state's Extension Education Teleconferencing Network. Students registered for either two graduate or undergraduate credits.

The Milwaukee district reading supervisor who facilitated the district-level activities described above took this course for credit. While taking the course she also tried out the new reading strategies with a third grade class in a nearby school. These trials then were shared during the teleconferencing sessions.

Because the Teaching Reading Comprehension series is broadcast over the state public television network both semesters, individuals can view the programs on a noncredit basis. The viewer's guide can be purchased for $3 from the Educative Services Division of the state's public television network.

By Individuals

Teachers who are using the Storylords video and computer comprehension instruction materials also have viewed the Teaching Reading Comprehension videos on their own because the Storylords materials introduce new strategies presented in the videos. Teachers who are unfamiliar with these strategies consider the Teaching Reading Comprehension programs an important source of background information. A specific example of this self-directed inservice education took place in Fond du Lac, WI. The director of media services recorded the video programs as they were broadcast over the state's public television network. He then made copies of each program for teachers to use with their own VCRs at home. Many teachers who checked out tapes over the summer continued to do so during the fall semester.

Evaluation of the Practice

Teachers claim that the main advantage of the programs is that they present many ideas in a short amount of time. One reading specialist said, "The programs do in 29 minutes something I cannot do -- take the audience into a classroom, highlight reading-research literature, show the expert in the field, and give the visual charting of what's happening."

However, viewing the video programs seems to be insufficient for teachers to become "strategic teachers." Using the new practices in an actual classroom is essential for learning to occur. Learning occurs when teachers try the strategies as well as when they view and discuss the program.

Learning one new strategy every other month may be the most many teachers (and their students) can manage. Teachers and students learn the same strategic behaviors and constructive processes, although teachers learn additional instructional methods.

Teachers who view one program per week are overwhelmed with all the information and ask for more time. However, more time alone is insufficient to develop strategic teachers. Teachers need to become proficient in teaching each strategy before they begin to think in terms of students' mastery of that strategy. Although the amount of time required for teacher proficiency varies, one to two months per strategy seems a minimum, given all the other work required of teachers. In some cases, teachers may help students develop one new strategic behavior per semester.

Discussing the new strategies with an expert is essential for teachers' success. Teachers appreciate and need facilitators and guests who can expand upon the ideas and examples presented in the video programs. But these discussions alone are insufficient for developing strategic teachers.

At least 90 percent of the teachers and reading specialists learning the strategies for the first time need experiences in which the reading teacher educator, reading specialist or reading teacher, who is skilled in strategic teaching, visits their classroom. Learning occurs through observation and discussion of actual lessons.

Of course there are exceptional teachers who do not need observation and coaching. But they need to discuss their new instruction with others who can provide knowledgeable feedback, not for instructional purposes, but rather for keeping up morale. These exceptional persons find few fellow school staff who either understand or support the extra work involved in becoming a strategic teacher or realize that curriculum change is a long-term project that will require more than a semester or year.

Teachers and administrators who become strategic teachers seem to approach reading strategies as a conceptual task, rather than merely a management task that involves adding something new to the program. Nonconceptual learners reduce the new reading approach to one with which they are already familiar. This reduction results not only in an oversimplification of the content presented in strategy lessons, but also the failure to add the new instructional methods. Neither strategic teachers nor strategic readers are created.

Working with other school/district staff who also are learning about strategic readers helps to facilitate the curriculum change project. Including library media specialists in the inservice opportunities is helpful. For example, in the school district of Manitowoc, Wisconsin, one library media specialist was involved in a curriculum change project from the beginning because of her extensive involvement in the daily instructional process. She attended all inservice meetings, where she worked along with the second, third and fourth grade teachers and principals who were developing their own understanding of the reading comprehension strategies. While teachers edited their lessons to reflect new content and methods, the library media specialist looked for short stories particularly suited to practicing a particular strategy. During the school year, she reinforced the strategies during story times with students who were learning them in their classrooms. She also introduced the strategies to kindergarten and first grade students who came to the library for story time but who were not yet learning the strategies in their regular classrooms. And she searched for materials containing short paragraphs for teachers to use when teaching a particular strategy. These materials provided students opportunities to practice the strategies under the teacher's guidance.

Training librarians, therefore, can help the teachers' own learning efforts by reducing the time they must spend finding materials available in their schools and matched to the reading abilities of their students. This district also trained a fourth grade teacher aide in the inservice meetings to provide further learning opportunities for those students who needed them.

Primary grade teachers appreciate hearing middle and junior high teachers discuss the importance of primary grade student reading outcomes. Teachers and district reading specialists benefit from the opportunity to plan for implementation of reading strategies across the K-8 grade levels. Such interactions and district implementation plans help relieve some of the anxieties experienced by persons who are sincere in making radical changes in their reading programs. They are relieved to know that others are seeking similar changes, that others appreciate their work, and that the changes are deliberate ones tied into a district plan.

In the Oregon school district mentioned earlier, the Chapter 1 teacher also enrolled in the course and learned the reading strategies. This provided opportunities for cooperation among yet another group within the school staff who were seeking similar improvements in the reading program. Students who were having the most difficulty reading thereby had two opportunities to learn and use the strategies.

Exploration of the potential impact of this video series on other curriculum areas has not been done. However, most district reading specialists consider the information in the video programs appropriate for use by teachers in all curriculum areas. Video programs are needed which provide examples of high school teachers and students modeling the strategic behaviors in the different content areas.

Sources of Information About the Practice

Distributors

The Agency for Instructional Technology (AIT), except in Wisconsin, where Teaching Reading Comprehension is distributed by the Wisconsin Public Radio and Television Networks. To request additional information contact the following:

AIT, Audio-visual Representative, (800) 457-4509 or (812) 339-2203
Box A, Bloomington, IN 47402

Wisconsin Public Television Network, Educative Services Division
(608) 273-5500, 3319 W. Beltline Hwy., Madison, WI 53713

Other Related Materials

Becoming a Nation of Readers. Available from the Center for the Study of Reading, University of Illinois, 174 Children's Research Center, 51 Gerald Drive, Champaign, IL 61820.

Boyd, M. and M. Wilsman. "Strategic Teaching/Strategic Reading: An Inservice Approach With Promise." Wisconsin State Reading Association Journal, 30, 3, Spring 1986, (11-24).

Duffy, G., L. Roehler, and J. Mason. Comprehension Instruction. New York: Longman, 1984. (Chapter 18, "Direct Explanation of Comprehension Processes," is especially related.)

Duffy, G. and L. Roehler. "The Subtleties of Instructional Mediation." Educational Leadership, April 1986, (23-27).

The Reading Teacher, May 1987 issue.

Wisconsin Guide To Curriculum Planning in Reading. Bulletin No. 6305. Send $7 per copy and make checks or money orders payable to Publication Sales: Department of Public Instruction. Mail remittance and shipping address to Publication Sales, Department of Public Instruction, P.O. Box 7841, Madison, WI 53707-7841.

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